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# Do the Expressive Arts Therapies Aid In Identity Formation and Authenticity in the Latina Community? A Community Engagement Project

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Do the Expressive Arts Therapies Aid In Identity Formation and Authenticity in the Latina  
Community? A Community Engagement Project

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Dance Movement Therapy

Professor Elizabeth Kellogg

Do the Expressive Arts Therapies Aid In Identity Formation and Authenticity in the Latina  
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**Abstract**

Identity reflections lie at the core of empowerment and take place in a variety of settings. Unfortunately, many of these settings are tailored to serve the majority group, as well as the individual running the exploration, leaving “others” left out. So how do we transform the “others” from a state of questioning “Who am I?” to an empowered state of declaring “Who I am!”?

This project explored how the use of art, dance movement, narrative, and the uniting of a group of *ones* can promote identity explorations and empowerment of self and others so that the state of “Who I am!” can be achieved. In adapting a multimodal approach to a Latina (Latin and Female) oriented cultural model, strategies for overcoming this population's internal bias to mental health counseling can be examined with the goal of diminishing negative assumptions of what therapy “looks and “feels” like. Additionally, the appendices below can be utilized in their presented order to run a project like the one described in this paper.

### Introduction

For Latinas, they are often the *one* brown girl in class who others look at when the curriculum reaches the “cultural diversity” section. At internship, some are the *one* girl whose ethnicity can't be explicitly guessed. At work, some are the *one* Latina who gets passed up for the job because she is “too emotional.” So is that it? Can they really just be classified as the *one*, the other, when they feel like so much more? In a country where by number, Latinas are in the minority, it can begin to feel as though that is who they are; the *one*.

In society, people are defined by factors such as age, skin color, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, cultural expectations, financial standing, immigration status, region of birth or residence; the list goes on and on. For many in the Latinx (the gender-neutral alternative to Latino, Latina) community, the question of “Who am I?” depends heavily on their skin color, their gender, their hair texture, their accent, and other factors that distinguish them as non-Caucasian, rather than on how many languages they speak, how well they can dance, how tenaciously they follow their passions, or how deeply they love.

### So, Who am I?

Throughout my career, I have worked with various organizations that integrate deeply into the communities they serve. One organization I became involved in was Yo Soy LOLA (Latinas Orgullosas de Las Artes), whose mission was to raise awareness of the multidimensional Latina experience and to build a platform that unites Latinas to tell our stories, changes our narrative, and gives back to our communities through a fundraising event. Not only did we sell out the venue, raise \$5,000 more than our goal in scholarships, and throw an amazing celebration

of culture after the showcase, but the experienced connection in the room was one that was nearly indescribable.

For a moment, while witnessing both the performers and the audience, there was an unexplainably compelling energy in the room paired with a stillness that I will never forget. In that moment, a Latina was able to tell her narrative, on her terms, for a room full of people who were actively listening, and empathically connecting to her story. What I realized in that moment was that the power of this Latina's performance, aside from her incredible artistry, came from the fact that she told a story that everyone knew all too well: the narrative of being Latinx in this country and never quite feeling like enough. In every other setting, the people in this room were always the *one* Latinx at the job, or the *one* Latina in their class, but there, in that moment, all of us *ones* joined in a room together to celebrate narratives which connect us so deeply that we felt one with each other. I experienced a connection with my Latina roots on my own terms in a way I never had the opportunity to before.

In that moment, I knew exactly who I was. From that moment on, I became unapologetically authentic to myself, and rather than feeling like I was not "enough" of anything in particular, I felt lucky to be able to connect to so many varying cultures because of my life's cumulative experiences.

So, who am I?

I am the various dichotomies, embraced and sanctioned; an amalgam of authenticity.

**Goals of this Project**

This project was created to serve not only the participants, but to spark a ripple effect of impact that can be extend to three different, but connected groups; the *mujeristas* (participants), the community, and clinicians in the field.

**Communities.** Allowing community members to be a part of a workshop such as this encourages individuals and gives them tools to discuss, share, and release negative feelings that arise in society due to the various elements of being Latina (Latin and female), what makes them proud to be Latina, and how it affects their communities outside the room (Serrata, Hernandez-Martinez, and Macias 2016). Focusing less on areas that clinicians feel may need improvement and more on the strengths of the Latina community itself encourages individuals to promote empowerment in their communities through a strengths based approach.

Picard (2008) researched the effectiveness of training individuals that are already immersed in the community to facilitate empowerment groups for their peers. A domino effect was created when individuals used their newly explored and empowered self to pass down these tools, the tools they themselves learned from workshops like this, to future generations. This will help increase the numbers of strong Latinas working within and for their community. Another way to maximize the benefit for the community is to make the findings of such workshops accessible. This phenomena was beautifully put into words by Picard (2008) when she stated “Affect images... have great power to speak to the viewer through the eyes to the listening heart” (p. 113). Creating a project that generates information for a specific underrepresented community is incredibly important, but doing the research, then making the information

inaccessible to the group it serves is completely counterproductive and a disservice to those it is intended to advocate for.

This dilemma lead to my decision to display my findings in various mediums, such as providing the written analysis of what I observed in the workshop, as well as a creative writing, visual art, and movement responses to further the project's accessibility. Discussing the experience of the project in various ways will ensure it connects with individuals with an array of abilities, learning styles, and comprehension abilities.

**Mujeristas.** In this community engagement project, participants were referred to as *Mujeristas*. Before describing the concept of *Mujeristas*, it is integral to explain *marianismo*. *Marianismo* is the gender role in which women of the Latinx community are expected to maintain characteristics similar to the Virgin Mary. This entails maintaining virginity, both physically and spiritually, as well as being selfless, unadulterated, docile, and coy (Comas-Diaz 2013, p.65). Similarly, *mujerismo* speaks to a set of values Latinas follow, but this identity, unlike *marianismo* is more of a choice rather than a role one is born into due to its contemporary nature. Lillian Comas-Diaz (2013) described this concept exquisitely. She detailed that “*Mujerismo* responds to the needs of Latinas in the United States. It helps them to foster transculturation or the emergence of a new culture out of two different ones, in order to resist assimilation [and] interpret cultural differences as a source of power” (p. 65).

In my project, the *mujeristas* had the opportunity to discuss how their ethnicity impacts them in various environments and elements of life, while engaging with others in empathetic relationships. This promoted a unique space where they could support and be supported by others through shared narratives and experiences. I aimed to form an empathetic interrelationship

between other people in the room and in the community in hopes that it would aid the *mujeristas* in feeling more empowered during and after the workshop. This ultimate identity expedition, assisted by the arts, encouraged the *mujeristas*' appreciation of the unique and valued aspects of their identities.

**Peers/Clinicians.** Not only did this community engagement project encourage the debunking of cultural bias to therapy, therefore increasing the chances of Latinas entering or participating in the mental health counseling field, but it offered a unique person centered approach to learning about various cultures, and how those cultural aspects do or do not affect the individual being served for clinicians of non-Latinx descent. After experiencing, this workshop, clinicians will become more aware of and integrated with various communities and will be more likely to build connections through understanding and witnessing, rather than assumptions based on literature or stereotypes.

### **Literature Review**

This next section will review resources and research that support the need for community engagement projects using the expressive arts in the Latina Community, barriers, and ideals that may arise when working with this population, and support for why specific choices were made by this writer.

### **Oppression and Mental/Physical Health**

Researchers have found that experiencing oppression can impact the physical body in negative ways (Karcher and Caldwell, 2014). The socio-political concept of oppression is defined as one or many people using their domination, by way of force or numbers, on other groups of people who they deem less than. Typically, this oppression is put in place to prevent



the oppressed group of people from social, political, economic, or personal growth and mobility. Caldwell and Karcher (2014), explained that in Western cultures particularly, those who are put down for their “wrong skin color, wrong hair, wrong eyes, wrong body parts, wrong way of walking, etc” (p. 480). Due to their culture can manifest within that person or people say a “somatic effect” that would “alter our body image, our ability to track and appreciate sensory experiences, our expressive movement, and our ability to hold our bodily life in high regard” (p. 480). The focus for their research study was to assess how people from persecuted communities experience marginalization in their bodies and what effects that may cause. Caldwell and Karcher (2014) examined these experiences using a qualitative study of 30 individuals who identified as having a disability, being of the LGBTQ community, a person of color, or relating to any other social categories that experience oppression. Once interviews had taken place, researchers and co-researchers further explored the somatic feelings reported through art-based research. In this project, individuals from this community were asked their opinion of all elements of the project from the layout, to activity choices, to materials, and even what day of the week to hold the event. This helped ensure that choices made were not solely based on scholarly research, but the opinions of individuals in that community as well since ultimately it would benefit them.

### **Latinx Community’s Relationship to Mental Health Counseling**

In both the community and with the clinicians who serve this demographic, therapy in the Latina community is a controversial topic. The following are some core ideals of the community that may encourage a resistance towards mental health counseling that must be considered and treated with the appropriate sensitivity.

**Fatalism.** One of the sources of resistance of the culture to therapy is *fatalism*. Maria Bermúdez, Dwight R Kirkpatrick, Lorna Hecker, and Carmen Torre-Robles (2010) described this concept as the feeling that everything occurs because their god wills it and that it is ultimately out of their control. This makes them less likely to want to take matters into their own hands because someone else already has a plan for them that they cannot alter (p.159).

**Familism.** This refers to a strong sense of family connection, trust, and dependency. Studies have found that this concept contributes to the preferences held by individuals from this culture in times of need. According to a study by Bermúdez, Kirkpatrick, Hecker, and Torre-Robles (2010), approximately 22% of the Latinx community would talk to a family member or close friend, 21% would go to a religious source such as a church member or the bible, 19% would ask their parents for help, 12% would talk to their significant other, 12% would talk to a trustworthy friend, and only 6% stated they would consider a mental health clinician. A further affirmation as to why Latinas would be best suited for a community engagement intervention style is that in Latinx familism, females are assigned “the helping roles of nurturers, healers, educators, and diviners” making them the most likely to be receptive to the importance of nurturing and healing (Comas-Diaz 2013, p.63).

**Accessibility.** Seeking a therapeutic outlet is difficult for individuals due to the combination of lack of representation (e.g., lack of research and Latina clinicians in the field), accessibility issues (e.g., lack of health insurance, cultural beliefs, and language barriers), and implicit biases non-Latina clinicians may have (e.g., moving hips in the Latinx culture is common in dancing, but to someone of another culture it may be perceived as provocative or sensual) makes. This trifecta has contributed to the lack of representation in the literature, as well

as the field of clinicians. Sadie F. Dingfelder (2005), from the American Psychological Association, reported that the U.S. Census Bureau projects that by 2035 Caucasians will be outnumbered by “Hispanics” in many areas of the country (p. 53). She goes on that “as this population grows, psychologists can expect to see increasing numbers of Latinos in their waiting rooms, classrooms, and research labs... [but that] only about 1 percent of all U.S. psychologist practitioners identify themselves as Latino” (p. 53).

**Internal biased assumptions of what therapy looks like and entails.** The misunderstanding of what therapy, and those who could be helped by therapy, may look like also helps to explain why this population may prefer less clinical sources of support in place of mental health counseling. Leopolda J. Cabassa (2007) explained this in an understandable way by stating “A small but growing number of studies examining Latino attitudes toward depression and other mental health treatments reveals that certain attitudes (e.g., being ashamed of discussing emotional problems with clinicians, not wanting to discuss emotional problems outside the family, believing that antidepressants are addictive, and endorsing self-reliant attitudes) may deter them from seeking mental health care” (p. 494).

Additionally, not much consideration has been devoted to investigating ways to eradicate these discrepancies, which leaves many believing that their only options may be to rely on their “faith in God [to]... heal depression (79%) [or to rely on] God’s for forgiveness [to heal their depression] (68%).” Furthermore, among individuals who are willing to seek mental health counseling, it was found that 79% believed that their health insurance would not take on the payments to cover their treatment” (Cabassa, 2007, p. 502).

### Community Specific Adaptations

#### Tailoring Techniques To The Community

Finding ways to open up this community to mental health counseling while tailoring the techniques themselves to the group is argued to be the most effective way to reach the goal of empowerment and identity building. Matos, Torres, Santiago, Jurado, and Rodriguez implemented cultural responsiveness in tailoring techniques to make an intervention accessible to Puerto Rican natives. In using the Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (ECBI), it was found that revising the program using specific standards to fit the demographic achieved a significant improvement in symptoms (Matos et al., 2006).

Matos et al. gave examples of factors that should be considered before applying this intervention to a different culture than it was originally intended for. The authors emphasized the importance of clinicians being aware of specific cultural beliefs and values and how this allows them to better serve their clients. For instance, according to the research by Gonzalez-Ramons, Zayas, and Cohen, “Puerto Rican mothers highlight values such as respect, loyalty, and obedience in their young children, whereas Caucasian mothers tend to emphasize independence, autonomy, and assertiveness” (Matos, 2006, p. 207).

While there are various ideals that are specific to the Latinx community, Matos et al. highlighted those they have identified through research as the main core values. These standards are familism, *personalismo* (which places importance on having relationships with friends and family members that are heartfelt), *respeto* (the idea that individuals must respect others, namely elders and authority figures), and time orientation (the idea that the present is more important than planning for the future, being on time is not very important) (Matos et al., 2006).

Taking those considerations into account, some modifications were made to the workshop. First, although the workshop was stated to begin at a certain time, there was space in the agenda to wait for late comers to arrive to accommodate for time orientation needs. Also, familism and personalism dictate that it is integral to build bonds before beginning any sort of intervention.

### **Integrating The Community Into The Process**

Serrata, Hernandez-Martinez, and Macias continued research on the *Promotora* model which operates by integrating community members into the empowerment process and promoting leadership to improve the health of both parties (Serrata et al. 2016). The researchers studied the effectiveness of training individuals that are already immersed in the community to facilitate empowerment groups for their peers. This quantitative study analyzes participants on a pre and post basis to assess the impact of self-empowerment through that model.

This research found that it was beneficial to spend a significant amount of time building an interpersonal relationship with the client before moving onto the core issues. By using individuals of the same cultural background, who already are well versed in the values of the community, or providing training to others on how to implement those cultural ideals into their practice, it is possible to speed up the process while also amplifying the relationship due to shared ideals.

For the quantitative data study, individuals were processed on a 10 item “knowledge of leadership scale” that was created for this specific study. In total, through the various graphs created from the quantitative research and quotes collected through the qualitative research, researchers Serrata et al. (2016) found “Results of the present study provide support for the...

*promotora* models of training as culturally relevant approaches for leadership development” (p. 43) All of the participants felt more secure in their ability to be leaders in their community, and the researchers were able to document this process and improve the validity of the impact of having allies involved in the empowerment process. This study reminded me of the importance of consulting with individuals who are already working with the Latina community when creating my method, as well as inviting those individuals to participate in my project as *mujeristas*.

### **Methods**

As revealed in the literature review, there is a need for projects that promote identity building and empowerment for Latina women living in the United States. Designed to meet that need, this workshop offers various interventions to deepen the experience, is accessible for various learning styles, and fosters connection despite unforeseen barriers. This section will describe the components of the experiential workshop and the rationale for each stage of the intervention.

#### **Engaging The Community**

Since this project was designed specifically for Latinas, it made sense to reach out to my Latinx network through Chica Project (ChicaProject.org) and Yo Soy LOLA (YoSoyLOLA.com). I created various media posts to stimulate interest and get the word out about this “open to the community” event. The goal was to gain visibility and access to various individuals in the community by utilizing the platforms they were accustomed to, such as social media (Appendix A), Chica Project’s monthly newsletter (Appendix B), and messaging to Yo Soy LOLA’s network. Once an individual RSVP’d, an email was sent out to confirm their attendance

(Appendix C). The location for the workshop was a spacious classroom at Lawrence High School in Lawrence, MA, offered by a fellow organization member who teaches there.

### **Data Collection**

During this process, I chose to record observations through note taking as well as creating artistic responses in the same mediums used by the *mujeristas*. For instance, if they were writing, I wrote my observations. When they drew, I drew my response. Lastly, based on my observations of the groups' movements, I created a movement response that I later recorded and codified using a Laban movement analysis lens. These observations will appear as appendices within each intervention they correlate with.

### **Preparation the day of**

The workshop was held over a period of 4 hours, so an "in-house" agenda (Appendix D) was created to keep the group facilitator on track with directives, timing, and order of interventions. Since there are many ongoing components of this workshop, it is strongly advised that the group facilitator has a support member. This agenda was utilized by myself and a community member volunteer to assist me in keeping track of time, assisting with technical components of the event such as music and room set up, as well as distributing various materials needed for each different intervention.

I also provided the group members with a simplified version of the agenda so they were aware what the flow of the day would be for snacks, bathroom breaks, phone calls, etc. (Appendix E). In addition, since music is such a major part of this community's roots, a playlist was intentionally created for each activity that would appropriately accompany the task at hand

(Appendix F). The space was set up with desk-chairs set up in a circle that lined the classroom with the majority of the center being open space.

### **Workshop Itinerary and Interventions**

This next section will explain the order of, as well as the research that supports each intervention choice. Each subsection in this section correlates with its respective section on the agendas in Appendices D and E.

**Sign In.** All *mujeristas* (group members) were invited to make themselves a name tag, and get comfortable in the space while everyone was arriving.

**Introductions.** Next, *mujeristas* were introduced to statistics regarding the relationship the Latinx community has with mental health counseling and why, statistically, there is a need for the bias against therapy to be debunked, as well as for more representation in literature as well as the field. While these statistics were elaborated on earlier in the literature review, the group was given a brief overview in layman's terms. Additionally, the group was given a short description of my experiences with the Yo Soy LOLA event and how it influenced that day's workshop. Some group members had attended the event and were able to discuss their experience at the event as well.

**Village Rules.** Before any activities began, the group was encouraged to mold the idea of a safe space, into a "Brave space." Roxana Llerena-Quinn (2013), poignantly called to attention the need for a safe space, particularly for Latinx, and explains how often times, even within groups composed of minorities may feel silenced by their differences. They can often feel unsafe to speak their mind, which is why it is important to engage them and make space for their voice to be shared. Furthermore, "Failure to engage the minority voice, with curiosity and from a not-



knowing position, can prevent everyone from learning from that difference by allowing it to withdraw into silence untouched”( Llerena-Quinn, 2013, p. 344).

Some core ideas named by Llerena-Quinn that were designed to effectively cultivate this illusive safe space are: “Anticipate ‘otherness,’ discuss the value of this voice for learning... Improve structure and safeguards to process... Maximize ways to learn from others” (Llerena-Quinn, 2013 p. 344). Since this intervention called for individuals to at times take risks and open up to others more than they normally may have, a few additional guidelines were introduced to create a “Brave space” (Appendix G).

**Ice Breaker.** For the first activity, a mirroring activity was presented that would serve as an icebreaker to allow everyone to get to know others in the room, as well as a precursor to the movement segment later in the workshop. For this icebreaker activity, the *mujeristas* were asked to stand in a circle so everyone could be seen. The group was encouraged to go around the circle, one by one, stating their name, a word that described how they were feeling in that moment, and a movement to pair with it. Next, everyone in the group mirrored back that individual’s movement and proceeded to the next participant. Once everyone had gone, the group was introduced to the terms mirroring and embodiment.

**Mirroring.** Nova Golonka Carmichael (2012) clarifies the core skills needed in order to be culturally responsive, and identifies mirroring as the first imperative component (p. 109). She goes on to illuminate how vital it is, particularly for marginalized communities, to be with someone and take them through their lived experiences on a body level. Instead of telling them what it was like for them, they get to experience it for themselves. “The classic themes of in and out, belonging or not belonging, are potentially more complex for the individual who has never

experienced a life in which total authentic expression and acceptance is possible” (Carmichael 2012, p. 109). Kinesthetic empathy between movers allows for a deeper level of understanding on a nonverbal and verbal platform.

***Embodiment.*** Embodiment is the key component in movement that differentiates copying movement from feeling the emotion behind why they are being moved. Aposhyan (2004) illustrated embodiment as “the moment to moment process by which human beings allow awareness to enhance the flow of thoughts, feelings, sensations, and energies through our bodily selves” (p. 52). I tend to remind people how important it is that movement always serves a purpose. By moving to our emotions and tuning into those sensations and energies, we learn what our bodies need. When we embody the movements of others we can in turn learn what they need as well.

***Witnessing.*** The process of moving with a witness is very important because it helps the client feel seen. There is an importance in giving as well as receiving, and being seen by another can be powerful for the mover as well as the witness. Mary Whitehouse, a pioneer in dance movement therapy, stated that “The body is the physical aspect of the personality, and movement is the personality made visible” (as cited in Tortora, 2006, p. 221). While the external witness is watching and taking in what the mover is offering, the mover is aware of the others' presence, which enlightens their internal witness. In addition, by focusing on what feelings are evoked by the other person's movements, the witness learns to give the mover attention while simultaneously attending to their own feelings. This natural relationship addresses people's innermost longing to be seen, and the ability to perceive what they are viewing through nonverbal cues from others.

**Influences on our narratives.** The group was assured that they would have the opportunity to revisit certain aspects of their identity that were solidified, dig into part of their identity they may be questioning, and even discover new parts of themselves that they hadn't yet noticed until they witnessed the stories of others which shed light on their own narratives.

Since the group was already in circle formation, no direction needed to be given on where in the room individuals should be standing. This segment was designed to initiate self-reflection among participants and guide them to consider their own identity as well as how the identities around them have impacted their sense of self. Aside from the introspection this activity fosters, it also bolsters communication between group members, which serves as the foundation of the anticipated interpersonal connections.

As a forewarning, the group facilitator acknowledged that it would be difficult to decide on just one identifier because of the uniqueness that intersectionality encourages, but that it was imperative they push through the difficulty and choose just one. The group was introduced to the terms gender, culture, sexual orientation, immigration status, appearance, ability, socioeconomic status, and education, which were written on paper and spread out in circle formation on the floor in front of them. They were asked if any clarification of those terms was needed (Appendix H). Lastly, group members were instructed to stand inside of the circle of prompts while each question/prompt was read and to choose just one identity by sitting next to its respective paper on the floor (Appendix I). While sitting, the *mujeristas* were then given a few moments to share why they chose that identity with the rest of the group. This continued until all questions/prompts were completed.

A Question of Identity: Mirrors as a Tool for Self-Reflection by Susan Ridley (2015) supports the need for identity explorations and the positive impact they can have. Ridley (2015) opened by stating, “Having a strong sense of self can be a protective factor in resisting peer pressure and involvement in negative behaviors and a determining factor in the formation of one’s coping skills and resiliency to life’s challenges” (p. 130). In an attempt to enhance the positive effects of having a strong sense of self, the researcher focuses on themes that arose among participants. After observing the various mirrors, participants were asked which mirrors stood out. Four themes emerged as a result: “(a) image of self, positive or negative; (b) multiple self(ves); (c) embodied hope; and (d) lack of identity” (p.130).

This study identified that strengthening one’s sense of self depends heavily on many factors related to what the individual believes of themselves and how society influences that belief. In other words, influences such as society, culture, historical background, and individual experiences all amalgamate to define the reality of individuals. Another impactful portion of their study was the group sharing at the end, which revealed that processing as a group helped them gain a sense that they are not alone in their feelings. That support gained through community is vital in identity building since some parts can be gained or lost, and such a drastic transition can be taxing.

**Narrative therapy.** In this guided narrative exploration, everyone was invited to find a comfortable spot in the room and were given a worksheet of prompts (Appendix J), a writing utensil, and blank paper. Once comfortable, the group was given time to reflect internally and explore their narrative through writing using the prompts given.

Creative writing as a Tool for Assessment: Implications for Embodied Working, by Dr. Bonnie Meekums (2005), introduced a method of incorporating individual's narratives into the therapeutic process and influenced why narrative therapy was utilized in this project. Meekums (2005) explained that narrative therapy focuses on allowing individuals to tell their own stories of self, as well as what others would tell about them. A significant advantage of narrative therapy is that this specific process of story telling aids the therapist in understanding the individual's specific culture, and helps the client question implicit ideals they follow that are socially implemented (Meekums, 2005). During this process, the therapist gets to continue their role as a facilitator of mental health improvement while simultaneously acting as a witness when topics in which the therapist is not fluent arise.

One of the most significant assets of narrative therapy is its ability to assist the client in exploring their identity, whether they believe it to be solidified or a still developing and unknown. Meekums (2005, p. 97) asserted that "Identity is not seen as a fixed phenomenon, but is open to creation and re-creation in relationship with a witness." The experiences of our lives continually shape and mold our identity and only in moments of exploration can we identify our true sense of self. Telling their stories in a way where individuals can disentangle the complexities of their life's endeavors gives them the ability to reframe the past and the surrounding emotions and better prepare for the future.

### **Draw Your Narrative**

For this portion of the intervention, the group was asked to continue their inward focus, take into account the narrative they had written down, and translate their narrative into a visual art form using charcoal or oil pastels. Drawing was chosen as an additional layer of narrative

therapy through a different medium due to the possibility that there may have been language barriers as well as educational barriers, which could prohibit an individual from being able to express themselves through writing effectively. In addition, while the writing portion was a great vessel for the facts of what occurred, the art portion can serve as a visual depiction of how the individual experienced that occurrence and the emotions behind it.

Moreover, drawing serves as a less strenuous way to depict one's own narrative and removes the pressure of feeling the need to divulge every detail on paper. Thomas D Carlson (1997), stated that the main goals of including art into narrative therapy are to "1) bringing forth of dominant stories, 2) externalization of the problem, 3) unique outcomes," and having an audience to view the work (p. 275).

The process of having individuals express their narratives can be enlightening as it uncovers what dominant narratives they believe influence and guide their lives. It can also shed light onto that person's opinion of whether that guiding force is positive or negative. Furthermore, utilizing art can help the externalization process of allowing individuals to view the problem as a separate entity, rather than perceiving themselves as the problem; in this particular setting, it is the notion that the difficulties they face due to the dominant narrative may not be unique to themselves (Carlson 1997, p. 279). Commiserating over the shared difficulties aids in the internalization that the struggle they face is part of a larger biopsychosocial-political system rather than any fault of their own.

Given that Latinx individuals are considered a "minority" demographic, this may be the first time that they are in a room of individuals who look like them (that are not family members) and their first time hearing that their experiences form a commonality between individuals of

their culture. This realization can relieve self-blame. This experience leads into Carlson's (1997) component of "unique outcomes" and changing a person's relationship with their perceived struggle (p. 279). Recognizing shared experiences and new views the group may share of their past narratives through art sharing is important in promoting changes in attitudes towards the struggle, and additionally serve the purpose of amplifying stories in a less time consuming way than other possible methods.

**Move Your Narrative.** In this portion of the exploration, an individual self-selected to go first, was invited to place their drawn narrative anywhere they felt it belonged in the room, and direct the rest of the *mujeristas* to the position where they wanted them to view the artwork from. They then placed themselves somewhere in the room that they felt comfortable witnessing the group from, and the group facilitator stood next to her. The group took a collective breath in and out, and prepared their ears for active listening, their eyes for true vision of the drawings depiction, and their bodies to translate what they were hearing seeing and feeling into movement.

The group facilitator then read that individual's narrative out loud while they listened and witnessed the group moving to their story. Once the narrative was fully read and the group came to a pause, the group was instructed to offer a movement or posture to the author of that narrative that represented what they perceived as their strength and empowered self. The writer was then invited to either choose one person's movement, or to combine multiple movements/postures that resonated with them to embody. Once they chose their movement, the group mirrored it back as a whole and focused on embodying that sense of empowerment.

Lastly, the group took a cumulative breath in, held it for 5 seconds, released the breath as they returned back to their own neutral body posture, and the writer was instructed to decided to

place it somewhere in the room, throw it away, fold it up for later, gift it to someone, etc. This allowed for closure and acted as a reset of the space for the next individual to come forward for their turn.

The format of this activity, which is grounded in the techniques of playback theater, complements the benefits of art making, moving, mirroring, embodying, witnessing, and sharing, as it can amplify the benefits mentioned in previous sections. Playback theater, put simply, is a technique in which individuals act out the story of another person. The act of temporarily living another person's narrative, while the witness is simultaneously experiencing their own story externally, can be a powerful encounter. Not only is this technique considered a vessel for “social intervention,” in that it gives space to individuals from communities which are typically suppressed and depreciated to speak their lived truths, but it also gives the witness a new perspective which can provide a transitional space to alter the point of view of both parties and potentially facilitate a higher knowledge and release of past hindrances (Rowe, 2007, p. 161). Rowe (2007) goes on to conclude that ““Playback theatre is an instrument of the culture of remembrance, where the personal stories of many people may come together, and where they can be connected to the wider history”” (p. 163). The ultimate culmination of the effects that playback theater, he argues, are openness, connection, seeing, being seen, and empathy (Rowe, 2007). Given that these effects correlate so strongly with the goals of this project, it is significant evidence to support the utilization of this intervention.

**Closing.** In Latinx culture, gift giving is not a breach of professionalism, but rather a method of saying “I trust you, I appreciate you, and thank you” on a non-verbal level. Giving something to each person in the group to take home as a reminder of the growth that occurred



throughout the workshop serves as a transitional object that brings the learning outside of the workshop space. The last activity began by giving every individual two envelopes that each contained an inspirational quote. Each person was directed to keep one for themselves and to give one to a group member. Then, each person with more than one envelope was asked to choose one to keep and either throw another one in the center of the circle or gift it to another group member again. Lastly, anyone who still had multiple envelopes was instructed to choose the quote they believed was meant for them and throw the others into the center. Each quote was hand selected by the group facilitator to promote inspiration and consisted only of quotes by Latinas (Appendix K). Not only is this a tangible object to take away from this space, but it is also a unique way to provide a simple activity to the *mujeristas* that they can utilize in their community.

### **Final moments**

To wrap up the entire experience, the group came together in a standing circle, put their hands on each others shoulders and closed their eyes. The group facilitator began by squeezing the shoulder of the person to their right and when that person felt it, they did the same. This continued until the energy/squeeze travelled all the way around the circle and arrived back to the group facilitator. The group facilitator said a few closing words, inviting the women to take a deep breathe in while allowing all the learning and experiences they had today to spread throughout their beings, and then breath out anything they felt they did not need to hold on to. The group did one more collective breath in while squeezing the shoulders of the people next to them, then as they breathed out, the group opened their eyes, dropped arms, and took one last look around the group.

## **Results**

The results of this workshop will be reported in this next section. Observations made during each intervention component will be described in narrative form, as well as through corresponding mediums (when the group was writing, the group facilitator was writing; when the group was drawing, the group facilitator was drawing; etc.) As previously mentioned in the “Integrating The Community Into The Process” section of the literature review, it was integral to include individuals of the same ethnic background who were already integrated in that community. A dance movement therapy intern and drama therapy intern who had been working closely in the Chica project community were invited to assist with the interventions and were briefed on the objectives and given directives on how to carry out specific activities in this workshop. This provided familiar faces to the attendees as well as a helping hand for the group facilitator.

### **The day of**

Upon entering, individuals signed in, made a name tag, then took a seat in one of the chairs on the outskirts of the room. After about 5 individuals were in the room, the music was turned on loud enough to be heard, yet low enough to talk over. Once the music did go on, the energy in the room shifted and everyone started talking to each other more, moving in their seats, and some even quietly singing the words. Once everyone had shown up, the group was invited to grab some food while the first directives on the agenda were carried out.

### **Introduction**

Once everyone had gotten their food and conversations had died down, the group facilitator conducted introductions and the drama therapy intern introduced the group to the

village rules. After asking if anyone had any further group expectations to add to the village rules, the differences and similarities between safe spaces and brave spaces were discussed throughout the group to make sure everyone had a solid understanding of the space's environment. The group remained non-verbal but visibly present as evidenced by gestures of agreeance and continued eye contact throughout.

### **Ice Breaker**

Before delving immediately into the core activities, it was clear that the group still needed to feel more acclimated to the space and familiar with other group members. To achieve this, the dance movement therapy intern facilitated the Mirror Me exercise, which also gave the group facilitator ample time and space to witness the movements of the group in preparation for the rest of the intervention. During the first round of this exercise, when the group gave their name and a movement to describe how they were feeling in that moment, most individuals displayed a stationary pose with neutral efforts in the near reach. After each member had offered a movement, the group facilitator explained the concepts of mirroring and embodying with the purpose of calling to attention and emphasizing the importance of the energy and feelings fueling the movements.

During the second time round the circle, each individual offered more of a movement phrase rather than a stationary pose even though their instructions remained the same as during the first round. Common themes observed in the movements and mirroring of *mujeristas* in this round were increased attention to the efforts, whether they become stronger or lighter, quicker or slower, etc., and that use of the horizontal and vertical planes extended past the near reach into the mid reach.

**Influences on our narratives**

During the first few prompts, it became clear that many individuals shared similar influences, as many chose the same identifiers as their peers. For example, when asked which identify was most apparent at home, many *mujeristas* identified education or gender. When asked which identity was typically kept hidden, most chose sexual orientation and socioeconomic status. As the questions became harder and it got more difficult to choose just one identity, the body postures of the group became visibly tense. The group facilitator paused and invited the group to notice how bodies were being held in the space. One individual stated that most people had their arms crossed, shoulders held up, and legs crossed while standing in one spot. Another individual attributed these postures to a combination of the room being a bit cold as well as the fact that some of the questions address things that typically Latinas have to be defensive of in society.

The group facilitator reminded and comforted the group that this was a unique space that offered the chance to be brave and provided the security of a safe space. Keeping this in mind, the facilitator had the group maintain their body postures, take one cumulative breath in, hold for five seconds, and breathe out. Next, the group was instructed to maintain their current body posture, but to tense it up even more so, squeezing and engaging all muscles in their body on an inhale, hold for five seconds, then let the air out in a quick audible exhale while dropping all limbs and shaking the tension off.

The questions continued and while some retreated back to their tense and defensive body postures, some maintained open postures and became noticeably more engaged both verbally and physically. As similarities among the *mujeristas* began to emerge, the rest of the individuals who

had previously remained tense began to loosen up the parts of their bodies that were held and share openly more easily. From this point on, the conversations began to flow and a significant transition occurred – the previous trend of each individual talking directly to the facilitators shifted to more of a group involved conversation where the *mujeristas* were conversing with each other as well.

### **Explore Your Narrative**

During the transition to this segment of the workshop, conversations were still occurring and becoming more passionate as everyone began to open up and vent about experiences they mutually experienced in separate settings. Though the conversation continued while the materials for the narrative writing were being distributed, once the music accompaniment for this section began, the group became silent and everyone immediately became very focused on the blank paper in front of them.

At first, many of the *mujeristas* stared at the prompt paper and the blank paper with a look of confusion, which would later be explained as a look of “where do I start?” After some moments of contemplation and the tentative development of a few opening sentences, the entire group delved into a fervor of writing which struck the facilitator as an impassioned attempt to give their lived narratives corporeal form. For some, this was the first time they had ever been given the opportunity to describe the events that have formed the core essence of their sense of self.

Once an embodied observation of the group was completed and the experience was then recorded through a written reflection (Appendix L). Once it was announced that time this portion to come to an end, some people took to massaging their hand for relief from such arduous

writing, while others still strained to complete their thoughts. A few additional moments were given for the group to come to a cumulative halt and prepare for the next intervention task.

### **Draw your narrative**

During the transition into the next portion of identity exploration, eye contact and small side conversations took place, but there was a sense of focus on the task at hand that could be felt in the room. It was as if everyone in the room was so enveloped in the mission of expressing the extensive narrative that lived inside of them that no time was to be wasted on distractions. Once the group returned to their comfortable spot in the room to begin the drawing, the music was turned on and the creating began.

Many of the pieces began with two separate elements on opposite sides of the paper that were drawn with precision and little to no blending of the pastels. As the time passed, connections between the separate elements began to form and large movements in mid and far reach were seen as participants blended the parts that connected the elements. The group facilitator walked around the room tactfully, so as to not disturb anyone's process of creation, with the intent of noticing the energy in the room, the efforts used in the *mujeristas* bodies while they created, and common themes that appeared in the artwork. After a few moments of tuning into what the group was expressing, the group facilitator took to an artistic reflection through drawing (Appendix M).

### **Movement activity**

After explaining the format of this portion of the intervention, some *mujeristas* appeared confused, others looked nervous, and others looked excited. To reassure the group in this new style of exploration, the group facilitator reminded them that movements could be as big and

extensive as dance moves and could also be on a micro scale, such as facial expressions. There was still some visible anticipation, but it was dispersed after doing the activity once and the nervousness of the unknown was released.

During the first narrative exploration, it was clear that the *mujeristas* that still felt uncomfortable were trying to push themselves to participate regardless of this feeling, and those who were ready and willing to go for it were restricting their movements so as not to stick out from the rest of the group. As the explorations continued, the group's movements became more and more expressive and some members even began to move throughout the space rather than just standing in the same spot.

At one point, a group member who will be referred to as Emily (pseudonym) stated that the combination of the story and the drawing in front of her made her want to leap. When asked why she chose not to act on her impulse, she stated that she didn't want to take up so much space. She was encouraged to take as much space as she felt she wanted, since this room was created for that very purpose – to provide ample space for those individuals who are typically told by society to change and take up less space – and to experience an authentic release. From that moment, Emily and other group members were seen to take more risks, such as walking around the space, using near, mid, and far reach, performing a variety of efforts, and trying movement patterns they had not yet executed in this space.

After everyone had gone, the theme every single participant held in common was the idea of being not enough, yet simultaneously too much, and never finding a space to be completely and authentically themselves. They all recounted stories of not feeling Latina enough at home,

yet not white enough everywhere else they went, and how being a woman makes it even more difficult because it brings a whole other set of burdens that dictate how they should exist.

Many also reported gaining new insights from seeing how others moved in response to their stories. Some *mujeristas* mentioned that the way the group moved resonated with them **because** it was reminiscent of how they had navigated the spaces in their narrative at that time in their lives. Others stated that witnessing the group's movements opened their eyes to how much of a split was occurring not only in their stories, but in their bodies as well. This led into a discussion about dichotomies vs. amalgams and how code switching can become a barrier to authenticity. Code switching is the act of changing how one presents themselves through clothing, body language, verbal language, accent, etc., in order to more easily assimilate to a particular community. Many talked about going to work or being with professionals and having to put on a facade everyday to be taken seriously and then coming home and being confused about who they really were at their core. The group also talked about code switching being utilized as a defense mechanism, rather than as a tool to be used to help one succeed in various settings and as a way to maintain authenticity and true identity in their everyday lives.

Lastly, the older members of the group talked about how proud they were of the younger girls in the group and how excited they were for this new generation to grow up and impact society in a powerful way. They expressed wishing they had had experiences like this workshop that would have allowed them to discuss these issues when they were younger so they could have developed a stronger sense of self identity and had the ability to start standing up for members of their community at an earlier age. The younger girls responded by thanking them for being role models from which they could learn and seek mentoring.



To document these powerful moments, the group facilitator created a movement response once the workshop had ended. For the sake of documentation in this type of project, the group facilitator selected screen shots from the beginning, middle, and end to highlight the progress of the *mujeristas* throughout this portion of the intervention (Appendix N).

### **Reclaim our narratives**

The goal of this workshop was to motivate and inspire the participants to continue exploring their narratives, and the narratives of others, through conversations and activities with others in their community. Facilitated by the brave, safe and open space of the room and by the individual participants themselves, this portion of the intervention was designed to do just that. Each group member was given an inspirational quote that served not only as a motivational statement from powerful people that were familiar to them, but also as a way teach them that the act of simply giving an affirmation to someone who needs it can be a way to start this journey of self exploration in their own homes, schools, jobs, etc. This part of the intervention was filled with smiles, giggles, eye contact, and overall connection. When the group was asked to offer a movement to pair with their newfound sense of self and inspirational quotes, the movement patterns displayed were incredibly uninhibited. There was certainty, strength, and empowerment behind these movements – a complete change from the first movements displayed in the first introductions of the day. Some individuals even closed their eyes as they moved as if in a world of self-acceptance and indulgence.

### **Last Moments**

At this point, the group had been together for almost four hours and the air in the room was one of a group that had been together for almost four years. There was a closeness and a

kinship in the space and when the group facilitator asked if anyone was uncomfortable taking part in a closing activity which included touch everyone shook their head as if to say “No, of course we are fine with it” as they came closer to each other in the circle. The group put their hands on each other and continued to carry out the last moments, closing as a collective group. When the group was told they could let go of their neighbors shoulders and end the day, there was a pause, as if they were not ready to break the connection, but slowly, one by one, the *mujeristas* dropped their arms and came back to themselves.

### **Exiting the space**

In the Latinx culture, departing from a group does not consist of simple handshake and a quick “goodbye.” It is a ceremony in and of itself, and can take anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours. In this setting, goodbyes consisted of hugs, cheek kisses, and thank yous. The group facilitator heard many comments made by the group members stating that they wished they had access to workshops and materials such as these more often so they could continue their practice of self exploration. This prompted the group facilitator to offer the group the option to take some of the supplies they used throughout the day home. This also falls into the traditions of gift giving to those they are grateful for.

When doing this in other settings, the resources available to the group facilitator must be considered before giving out supplies, but in this case, the supplies were a small portion of those owned by the facilitator. The facilitator felt that the need of the group for these resources surpassed her own need to retain the supplies. The joy that leapt across each individuals face as they chose from stickers, drawing materials, papers of all colors, and new pencils was priceless to witness.

## Discussion

Although this capstone's preparation has been a nine month exploration, the foundation of this project has been a lifetime in the making. While the lessons learned throughout this process have been vast, a handful of core concepts emerged that are vital to the furtherment of molding the expressive arts therapies to the underserved Latinx community. I will begin by highlighting the core themes that arose, then, make note of considerations/limitations, and finally make recommendations for future research.

### Primary Themes

**Amalgam vs. Dichotomy.** Some of the statements made during this workshop by *mujeristas* sharing personal experiences included: "I am constantly inbetween," "Am I this or that," "Why can't I be both," "My family calls me *la gringa* (a slang word typically used as an insult that refers to a non-Latinx individual, especially one of U.S. descent)," and "Society calls me a foreigner, or immigrant, or minority, but I was born here." Every single participant reported that the narratives that resonated with them the strongest were those that described the dichotomies of their identities.

Living in a society where American culture encourages independence and individualism, while Latinx culture simultaneously favors familism, creates a clashing of morals and leaves those who identify as Latinx Americans with no neutral space to find solace. The separate labels and social expectations placed on them cause a feeling of being split and pulled in various directions. The group discussed the feelings behind this phenomena and the general consensus was that these strict expectations and the need to code switch in every environment they enter

disrupts their ability to explore their true identities and essentially robs them of their authentic selves.

**The effect of intergenerational trauma.** The effects of intergenerational trauma, values and ways of life learned over generations, also emerged as a theme during the workshop. These values and ways of life had been taught to the group by their parents, who were taught by their parents, who were taught by their parents, and so on and so forth. Once the lessons had reached them as the newest generation, the reason behind the lesson had been lost. For example, one conversation where this emerged in particular focused on the topic of education. Many of the group members felt extreme pressure to do well in school and get good jobs since their parents and grandparents may not have had the opportunity to succeed in school, due to barriers such as language and resources. This led many members of older generations to often become maids or janitors.

In that same push to become educated and professional, the *mujeristas* who had accomplished higher education and became professionals also felt that they were looked at differently by the same family who had pushed them to succeed –they were referred to as *Gringas*. After reaching their goals, they were in some ways looked at similarly to those who had hired their ancestors to clean the floor and tend to the home. This intergenerationally influenced circumstance leads to the mystification of what success really is for those who do not understand the root of these complexities; when they succeed in one setting, it seems like they fail in another.

**The ability to more accurately represent narratives through multiple mediums.**

Perhaps the most significant result of this project was that many *mujeristas* reported that the

combination of writing, drawing, and moving helped them to express and understand their narratives more accurately. Those experiencing the narratives reported gaining a deeper understanding due to being immersed on an auditory, visual, and sensory level, rather than if they had only experienced the narratives through just one of those mediums. Some supportive statements made were “I saw you doing pulling motions during my narrative and I didn’t have the words to describe how it felt before, but it felt very much like I was being pulled in different directions,” and “As I moved your narrative and looked at your drawing, it felt exactly like what I experienced growing up.”

One example of a deeper level of empathetic connection that occurred was when one individual who moved to another’s narrative stated “during your narrative I just really felt like I wanted to leap across the room and break out, but I didn’t.” This person felt the narrator’s feeling of being pressured and stuck and experienced it on not only a cognitive level, but on a physical level as well. She wanted to physically help her break free of the binds that were placed on her during that time of her life, but could really feel the pressure holding her back.

**Words to describe the workshop.** At the end of the day, group members were asked to give three adjectives to describe their experience. Some words that came up were “powerful, exciting, liberating, reflective, calming, empowering, spine tingling, informative, engaging, educational, opening, inspiring, joyful, growth, love, therapeutic, community, creative, healing, and great.” Some other reflective statements made included “I now realize I’m not alone,” “you can have many identities and don’t have to only embrace one,” “incorporating art helped express my identities and internal feelings,” and “This was so healing.” Additionally, one of the

participants felt inspired by the day and created a write-up on the event for the Chica Project which gave additional insight from the lens of a *mujerista* (Appendix O).

### **Considerations and Limitations**

Firstly, there were elements of this project that were not completely controlled, in that some of the participants knew each other from previous events. In addition, some of the adults in the room had been mentors to young Latinas before and had focused on identity. In future studies, it would be useful to test this with a group of individuals where no one knows each other, as well as with a group of individuals who all know each other. These tests will provide further insights into whether this project is best fitted to forming new connections between individuals within a community, or to further develop connections within a group and foster stronger relationships.

Secondly, all observations recorded in this discussion stemmed from my own memory and insight. With that said, there is the potential for bias and influenced interpretations in these observations, despite my efforts to remain objective. Having a witness who is fluent in movement analysis present to record what transpires may provide a more independent analysis of the developments that occur. To control for bias even more, the facilitator could create pre- and post-workshop questionnaires for the *mujeristas* to gauge their sense of identity, as well as to gain specific insight into what they experienced throughout the day.

### **Outcomes and Objectives**

**Mujeristas.** Throughout the workshop, many difficult topics were discussed by the group, such as ethnicity and its impacts, life as a Latina in today's political and social contexts, and other challenging elements of life, but ultimately, all *mujeristas* felt supported. Empathetic

relationships were cultivated on various sensory levels, as described above, and it was clear the learning would leave the space with them. Many *mujeristas* reported wanting to experience more workshops such as this one as well as expressing the intent to share this experience to others.

**Peers/Clinicians.** A primary goal of this workshop was to redefine how members of the Latinx community regard mental health counseling and therapeutic experiences. As evidenced by the many *mujeristas* reporting their desire for more workshops that focus on identity, this goal was achieved. Additionally, many reported wanting to facilitate activities like this one in their own networks, including the younger individuals in the room. Looking towards the future, this experience may have formed the foundation on which they can begin their own journeys of becoming healers in their own communities and adding to the diversity of the mental health field.

**Communities.** The accomplishment that I am most proud of is how successful this project was in transforming how the Latina identity is perceived by Latinas themselves. Specifically, over the course of the workshop, the discussion on identity transformed from a feeling of “being Latina fuels my struggle” to “being Latina fuels my strength to get through my struggles.” Acknowledging the struggle of being a woman of the Latinx community is important, but so is celebrating the rich and vibrant aspects of the Latina culture that make us so unique and proud.

Furthermore, my plans to provide this project as a resource for clinicians, teachers, organizations, schools, etc., continues and shows promise that it can expand on a larger scale based on the number of requests for access to this capstone and the partnering presentation/trainings. I also aspire to have this project translated into Spanish so to expand the amount of people who have access to it. Lastly, because observations have been documented not just

through the scholarly writing in this capstone, but through poetic writings, visual representations, and movement responses, the audience is free to witness the observations from this project in whichever modality they are best able to connect through.

In the past few months, this project has been presented at conferences such as the New England Dance Therapy Associations 2018 Conference and Lesley University's Community of Scholars Day Conference. One of the overall goals of this capstone and my presentations at these conferences have been to elaborate on specific cultural details of the Latinx community, share the experiences and insights that occur in the workshop, and provide resources to other mental health professionals on how to run this workshop in their own practices.

### **Conclusion**

*Circumstances determined your past, the present is embracing you, and only you can define your future."*

*-Teresita Marsal-Avila, J.D. -Latina attorney with 27 years of experience in Immigration and Naturalization law and has personally helped thousands of individuals and families achieve their American Dream. Teresita and her team of attorneys counsel individuals on how to embark on their path to legal residency and citizenship in the United States.*

If one thing that has become crystal clear throughout this process, it is that in exploring our identities, we are really backtracking down the path of our lifetime, retracing the steps that brought us to the present. This process allows us to go back and collect elements that hold significant influence our essence and choose which moments and experiences define who we are at our core. We are able to do this more confidently as we know who we will become in the



end. Conjointly, we have cultivated a personalized set of tools that equips us to navigate through whatever paths may lie ahead in an efficient and more authentic manner.

So, who am I? These three simple words that together make a short question spark a long train of thought. I am a woman, I am Latina, I am straight, I am a citizen of the United States, I am tall and curvy, I am a healer in my community, I am in the middle class, I am a student, and I am a soon to be professional in my dream field. Yo Soy Amanda and the search for authenticity through identity solidification will always be the at the heart's root of my work.

Facilitating spaces for others in my community to self-actualize and uncover their authentic identities has always been my passion, and through this program become my profession. I look forward to how this project, the *mujeristas*, the dedicated advocates in this field, and the actions of inspired audiences will continue to inspire new conversations, new discoveries, and the confidence to live authentically.

## **Appendices**

Appendices are listed in the order they were mentioned throughout the text of this project. To implement this project in your own community, this appendix section can be used as a manual.

### **Outline of appendix:**

- A. Social media posts
- B. Chica Project's monthly
- C. RSVPs
- D. In-house agenda
- E. Group agenda
- F. Playlists
- G. Brave Space village rules
- H. Identity terms
- I. Layout of identities\_
- J. Narrative worksheet of prompts
- K. Quotes by Latinas
- L. Written reflection
- M. Drawn Reflection
- N. Movement Reflection
- O. Chica Project Write up

## Appendix A - Social Media Posts

**Calling all Latinas!** You're invited to...



**Express Yourself**  
VOL. 2.1

**Join us at our upcoming workshop!**

**All ages welcome**  
Sunday, February 18th  
2018  
10:00 am - 1:00 pm  
Location: TBA

Space is limited, so reserve your spot by emailing [ABravo@lesley.edu](mailto:ABravo@lesley.edu)  
Please include your name, age, which workshop you are attending, and how you heard about this event.

**Free event today!**



**Express Yourself**  
VOL. 2.1

**Join us at our workshop!**

Sunday, February 18th 2018  
10:00 am - 1:00 pm  
Location: Lawrence High School  
70-71 N Parish Rd, Lawrence, MA 01843

This open community workshop is an uplifting event influenced by the expressive arts, facilitated by Amanda Bravo - a master's level Dance Movement Therapy student at Lesley University. This event was inspired by Latinas and their right to reclaim their narratives on their own terms.

Create and explore your authentic self through the use of music, art, dance, movement, writing, and more. Indulge in self love, playful imagination, and comfort food!

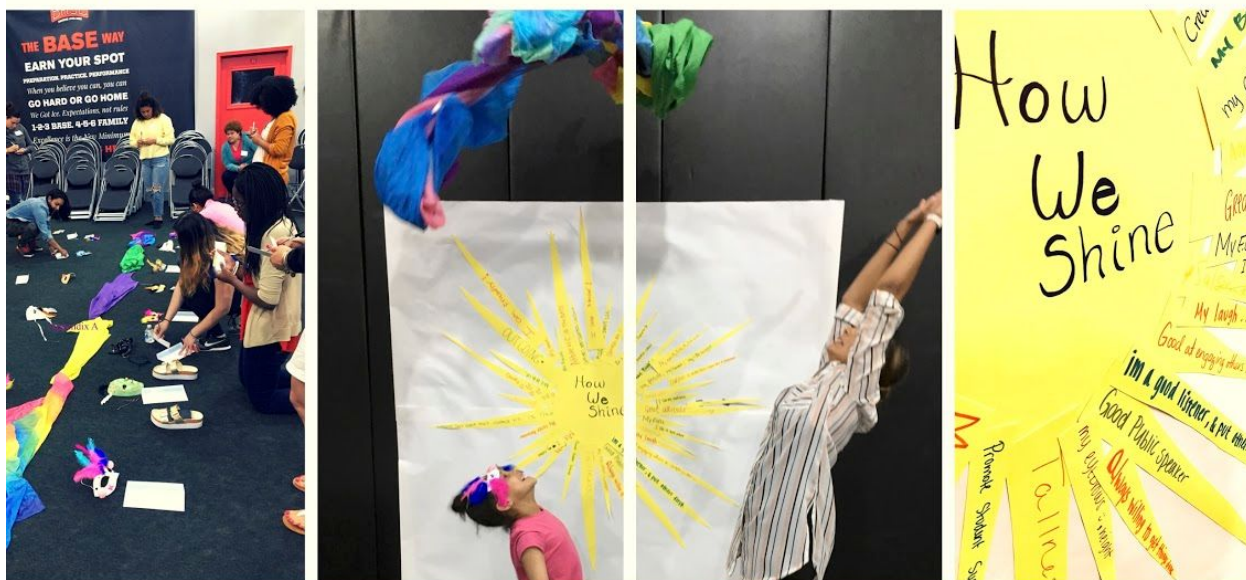
Appendix B - Chica Project's monthly newsletter

## Calling all Latinas! You're invited to...

# Express Yourself VOL. 2.1

This open community workshop is an uplifting event influenced by the expressive arts, facilitated by Amanda Bravo- a master's level Dance Movement Therapy student at Lesley University. This event was inspired by Latinas and their right to reclaim their narratives on their own terms.

Create and explore your authentic self through the use of music, art, dance, movement, writing, and more. Indulge in self love, playful imagination, and comfort food!



## Join us at one of our upcoming workshops!

**All ages welcome**

Sunday, February 18th 2018

10:00 am - 1:00 pm

Location: Lawrence High School

70-71 N Parish Rd, Lawrence, MA 01843

Space is limited, So reserve your spot by emailing [ABravo@lesley.edu](mailto:ABravo@lesley.edu)

Please include your Name, Age, which workshop you are attending, and how you heard about this event.



## Appendix C - RSVPs



Im so excited you are joining us this weekend for an unforgettable event!  
Just some quick reminders for the event:

When? Sunday, February 28th, 2018 - 10 am - 1:00 pm

Where? Lawrence High School

The event is open to all and no experience in the arts is needed to participate and we still have a few spots available. Please RSVP by 1/23 by 5 pm to this email ([abravo@lesley.edu](mailto:abravo@lesley.edu)) with their name, and age.

There will be some snacks provided and in addition, we are inviting participants to get involved in our potluck style lunch. We encourage participants to bring a small plate (2-3 servings) of food from their culture since there's no better way to bond than over food, music, and good company.

The day of the workshop, be sure to wear comfortable clothes and come ready to connect with others!

We look forward to connecting with the Latinas in our community to celebrate each other!

-Amanda

## Appendix D.1 - In-house agenda

## Express Yourself Vol 2.1

Lawrence High School

70-71 N Parish Rd

Lawrence, MA 01843

Sunday, February 18th, 2018

Time	Activity	Directions	Details
9:00 - 10:00	Prepare room	Set-up all materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Set up materials</li> <li>-Speakers &amp; laptop</li> <li>-Supplies for my response</li> <li>-Brave Space rules</li> </ul>
10:00 - 10:20	Sign In	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Name Tags</li> <li>-Intros</li> <li>-Who, Why are we here?</li> <li>-Why am I doing this?</li> <li>-Why are you doing this?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>1 % of U.S. mental health counselors identify themselves as Latino.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ One study showed amongst latinos:</li> <li>○ 22% “would go to family, a sibling, extended family member or their children,”</li> <li>○ 21% “would go to a priest or minister, church member, God or prayer, or the Bible,”</li> <li>○ 19% “would seek their parents for advice or guidance,”</li> <li>○ 12% “would seek their partner or spouse,”</li> <li>○ 12% “stated they would seek a friend or someone trustworthy,”</li> <li>○ 6% “stated they were not sure or would seek no one.”</li> <li>○ 6% stated they would seek a professional”</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>My experience &amp; LOLA</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What will today look like?</li> <li>○ exploring our identities and what they mean to us</li> <li>○ never given too much thought to our identities</li> <li>○ an essential part of our beings</li> <li>○ others are somewhere in between</li> <li>○ explore various things that make us unique and some things that connect us in a way that many have never done before.</li> <li>○ Using expressive mediums- going to delve into our pasts, present, and futures.</li> <li>○ revisit certain aspects of your identity that are solidified</li> <li>○ dig into part of your identity you may be questioning</li> <li>○ discover new parts of ourselves that we hadn't notice before when witnessing others and relating to their narratives</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
10:20 - 10:35	Village Rules	Group expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I'll have one already made and we can add to it if needed</li> </ul>

## Appendix D.2 - In-house agenda

10:35 - 10:55	Ice Breaker	Mirror me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <u>-Direction 1-</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ circle- state name &amp; 1 word to describe how you are feeling- pair with movement, everyone mirrors back, next participant</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <u>Script- add another element</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>focus on our intention and attention to how were moving. The goal is to embody- internal feelings vs. outward body expressions.</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>● <u>Direction 2-</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ circle- name- create a movement to represent yourself.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
10:55 - 11:15	Influences on our narratives	-Choose an identity activity -Group discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b><u>Introduction activity- (Influences on our narratives) You guys know this as forced choices!!</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Script-</u> get our minds thinking about how identities impact us, get to know each other a little better, reflect on what is happening internally, only choose one in each category <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Prompts/Questions-</b></li> <li>■ This is the identity I am most aware of at home.</li> <li>■ This is the identity that I am most aware of at school/ work.</li> <li>■ This is the identity I tend to keep hidden.</li> <li>■ When I think of my friends/peer group, this is the identity we have least in common.</li> <li>■ This is the identity that I think most people judge me by.</li> <li>■ This the identity that brings me the most struggle, challenge, concern.</li> <li>■ This is the identity I believe is the most important to me right now, in this room.</li> <li>■ I'd like to open up the floor now, is there anyone who would like to tell us about an identity or experience that I didn't ask about?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
11:15 - 11:35	Explore your narrative	Writing activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b><u>Main activity 1- (Explore your narrative)</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Paper, pen or pencil</li> <li>○ comfortable spot in the room</li> <li>○ prompts worksheet, Write (See Prompts)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
11:35 - 11:55	Draw your narrative	Drawing activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b><u>Main activity 2- (Draw Your narrative)</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ long sheet of paper</li> <li>○ draw your life narrative as described by your writing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Appendix D.3 - In-house agenda

11:55 - 12:40	Move your narrative	Movement activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Direction 1-</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ leader will read participant's narrative</li> <li>○ writer witnesses group embody spoken and drawn narrative as it is read</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Direction 2-</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ group embodies person in narrative as their fully empowered authentic selves through one pose</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Direction 3-</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ witness mirrors back one move that resonates with them from the group</li> <li>○ witness responds to what they witnessed with movement or verbally</li> <li>○ Repeat for other participants</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Direction 5- (AFTER EVERYONE WHO WANTS TO GO HAS GONE)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Debrief questions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Anything surprise you or provide new insight?</li> <li>■ Change your understanding of the written narratives seeing movement?</li> <li>■ What were you able to express in one medium that you couldn't in another?</li> <li>■ Did your drawing take you on a different path?</li> <li>■ Do you find it communicates what you intended?</li> <li>■ What was it like to witness others embody your story?</li> <li>■ Was it accurate?</li> <li>■ Why did your last chosen position resonate with you?</li> <li>■ Why did you or did you not respond with movement and/or verbally?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
12:40 - 12:50	Reclaim our narratives	Last activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Let everyone choose 1 quote <b>DO NOT OPEN IT!</b></li> <li>● Begin trading quotes with others in the room <i>thanking</i> the person you trade with (verbally, in english, in Spanish, in ASL, in eye contact, in body language, etc.)</li> <li>● Continue trading until you feel like you have the one that is meant for you and then take your place in the circle</li> <li>● read quote</li> <li>● create one movement that represents that quote and share with group</li> <li>● Group mirrors back</li> </ul>
12:50 - 1:00	Last Moments	Closing activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hands on shoulders</li> <li>● Pass energy around by squeezing</li> <li>● Contain energy</li> <li>● Breath into center of group &amp; focus energy in this room</li> <li>● Back in &amp; focus on the strength you have in you</li> <li>● Breath out &amp; keep some strength and energy for yourself and send the rest out into the world</li> </ul>



## Appendix E - Group agenda

**Express Yourself Vol 2.1**

Lawrence High School  
 70-71 N Parish Rd  
 Lawrence, MA 01843

Sunday, February 18th, 2018  
 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Directions</b>
10:00 - 10:20	Sign In	-Make name tag -Introductions -Why are we here? -Why am I doing this? -Why are you doing this?
10:20 - 10:35	Village Rules	Group expectations
10:35 - 11:55	Ice Breaker	Mirror me
11:55 - 11:15	Influences on our narratives	-Choose an identity activity -Snacks & group discussion
11:15 - 11:35	Explore your narrative	Writing activity
11:35 - 11:55	Draw your narrative	Drawing activity
11:55 - 12:40	Move your narrative	Movement activity
12:40 - 1:00	Inspiration to reclaim our narratives	Closing activity

## Appendix F - Playlists

**Playlist for Express Yourself Vol 2.1****Sign In & Village Rules**

1. Ya Comenzó – Luis Enrique, Rubén Blades
2. Quiero Bailar – Ivy Queen
3. Vacaciones – Wisin
4. Despacito - Versión Salsa – Luis Fonsi, Víctor Manuelle, Victor M. Ruiz
5. Danza Kuduro – Don Omar, Lucenzo
6. Conga – Gloria Estefan, Miami Sound Machine
7. Como La Flor – Selena
8. Taboo – Don Omar
9. On The Floor – Jennifer Lopez, Pitbull
10. Ojalá que llueva café – Café Tacvba
11. Lloraras – Billo's Caracas Boys, Dimension Latina, Oscar D'León
12. La Negra Tiene Tumbao – Celia Cruz
13. El Farolito – Juan Luis Guerra 4.40
14. Quimbara – Celia Cruz, Johnny Pacheco
15. Micaela – Sonora Carruseles, Luis Florez
16. Tu Cariñito – Puerto Rican Power

**Explore Your Narrative**

1. Latin Way (Soul Beats mix) – Nerga Beats
2. Relaxing Latin Beats – Cafe Latino Dance Club / Latino Dance Music Academy
3. Hablan Las Cuerdas - Boom Bap Latin Beat Mix – Fx-M Black Beats
4. Cumbia del Olvido – Nicola Cruz
5. Danza – Horacio Salinas, John Williams, Paco Peña, Inti-Illimani
6. Sueño en Paraguay - El Búho Remix – Chancha Via Circuito, El Búho
7. Lunchtime Latin – Myonlinedrummer, Feat. Craig Sowby
8. Latin – Carnao Beats
9. Latin Beats from Cuba – Cuban Latin Collection
10. Latin Instrumental Jazz – Cuban Latin Collection
11. Big Latin Band – Cuban Latin Collection
12. Latin Lounge Bar – Cuban Latin Collection

**Draw Your Narrative**

1. I Carried This for Years – Ibeyi
2. Mil Pasos – Soha
3. River – Ibeyi
4. Bachata En Fukuoka – Juan Luis Guerra 4.40
5. No Man Is Big Enough for My Arms – Ibeyi
6. Amor y Control – Rubén Blades
7. Vente Negra – Habana con Kola
8. I Wanna Be Like You – Ibeyi
9. Away Away – Ibeyi

## Appendix G - Brave space village rules

**Safe Brave Spaces**

- Vegas Rule**- Learning leaves & names stay
- Planet Fitness rule**- Judgement free zone (including self judgement)
- Believe in best intentions**
- Were only human**- Acknowledge emotions. Take breaks if needed. Step out of your comfort zone; into a brave space; lean into discomfort
- Actively listen**- Listen to understand, not to respond- this includes eye contact and checking your body language
- Silence is ok**- breath into the space
- Freedom to speak openly or be non-verbally present**
- Don't yuck my yum**- Honor our differences
- Use "I Statements" to state opinions and feelings**
- Have fun!**- Creativity is key

Appendix H.1 - Identity terms

# Gender

Appendix H.2 - Identity terms

Culture

Appendix H.3 - Identity terms

# Sexual orientation

Appendix H.4 - Identity terms

# Immigration status

Appendix H.5 - Identity terms

# Appearance



Appendix H.6 - Identity terms

Education

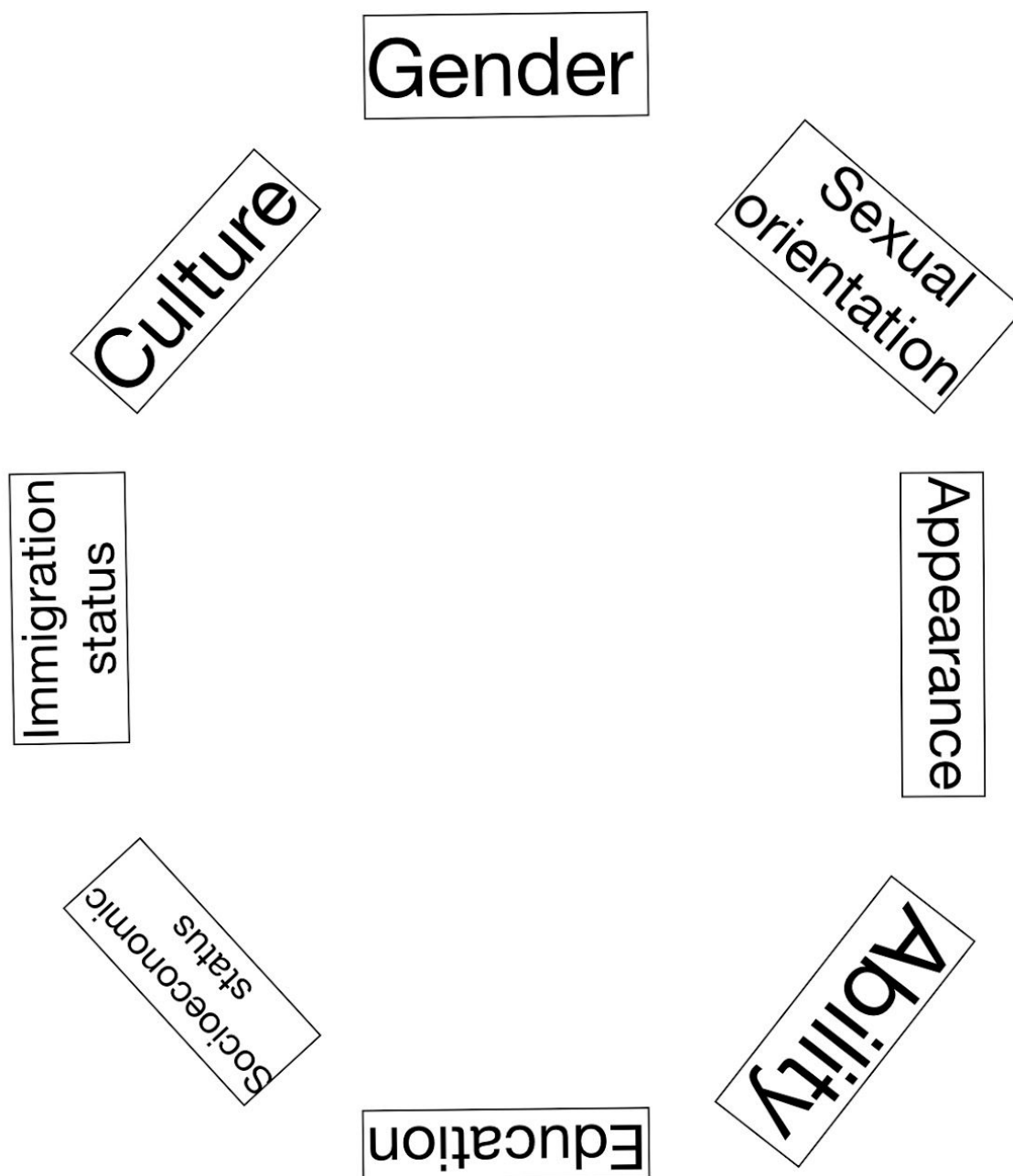
Appendix H.7 - Identity terms

Socioeconomic  
status

Appendix H.8 - Identity terms

**Ability**

## Appendix I - Layout of identities



## Appendix J - Narrative worksheet of prompts

## Explore your narrative writing activity

I encourage you to use these prompts to facilitate your writing. While they may aid in providing inspiration and structure, feel free to make any artistic decisions you find necessary. (Please be sure to include the last sentence in your writing)


**\*\*Please write as legibly as possible. If you are comfortable, your narrative may be read aloud\*\***

### Prompts:

- Growing up... (how did your culture, gender, or sexual orientation impact your identity as a child?)
- I looked different and/or the same from the kids I went to school with. How did that impact me?....
- My hardest time was... (what was your experience like?)
- The moment I began to notice my identity was... (when did you become aware of the concept of identity)
- Over time my identity has changed (in what way?).... (what influenced those changes?)
- The cultures I relate to most now are...
- Things about my culture I sometimes hide are... (and/or) parts of my culture I don't identify with are...
- Things about my culture I appreciate and am proud of are...

Last sentence: I am Latina and I am \_\_\_\_\_.


## Appendix K - Quotes by Latinas



“ ”

If you look confident you can pull off anything – even if you have no clue what you're doing.

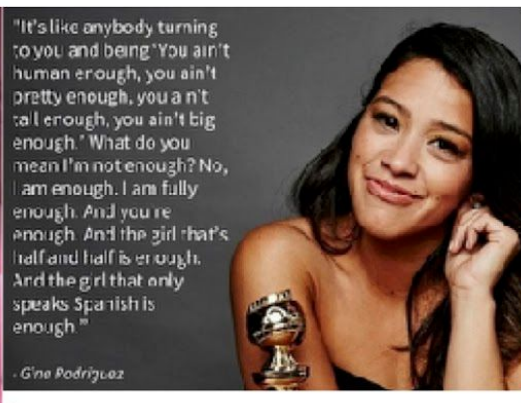
Jessica Alba



“ ”


You are valued, you are a goddess and don't forget that.

Jennifer Lopez



"It's like anybody turning to you and being 'You ain't human enough, you ain't pretty enough, you ain't tall enough, you ain't big enough.' What do you mean I'm not enough? No, I am enough. I am fully enough. And you're enough. And the girl that's half and half is enough. And the girl that only speaks Spanish is enough."

Gina Rodriguez




"Forgiving is not forgetting. Forgiving is remembering without pain."

Celia Cruz


"LATINAS ARE THE PERFECT COMBINATION BETWEEN A WARRIOR AND A PRINCESS"

MARINES DUARTE



"Don't let the hand you hold hold you down."


Julia de Burgos



I realized how Latina I was, and then also, at the same time, how not Latina enough I was, because I'm born and raised in Los Angeles. I speak Spanish, but I don't speak perfect Spanish, not like a native speaker.


(America Ferrera)

1xquotes.com



"We as women should shine light on our accomplishments and not feel egoistical when we do. It's a way to let the world know that we as women can accomplish great things."

Dolores Huerta



"Si tienes un sueño **NO DEJES** que **NADIE** te lo robe".

- Selena Quintanilla

## Appendix L - Written reflection

Explore Your Narrative

Soft sounds filling the space  
 Accompanied by the light taps of pencils on paper.

To compress a lifetime,  
 the essence of self,  
                   on paper  
 in a few fleeting moments  
                   is no easy task,  
                   but we are here.

Lay it out.  
 We are the few who understand  
                   how you've felt from the start  
 but learned to suppress all these years.

We are ready.  
 We are open.  
 We have begun.  
 We see you for the color of your soul,  
                   not for the color of your skin.

We are thankful to move alongside you.  
 The presence of others keeps the room warm,  
 yet the focus on my narrative keeps us individual.

The first dichotomy arises.  
 Being together but working alone,  
 an unspoken connection and camaraderie

Indepiendente pero junto  
                   Hermanas  
                   Comadres  
                   Mujeristas

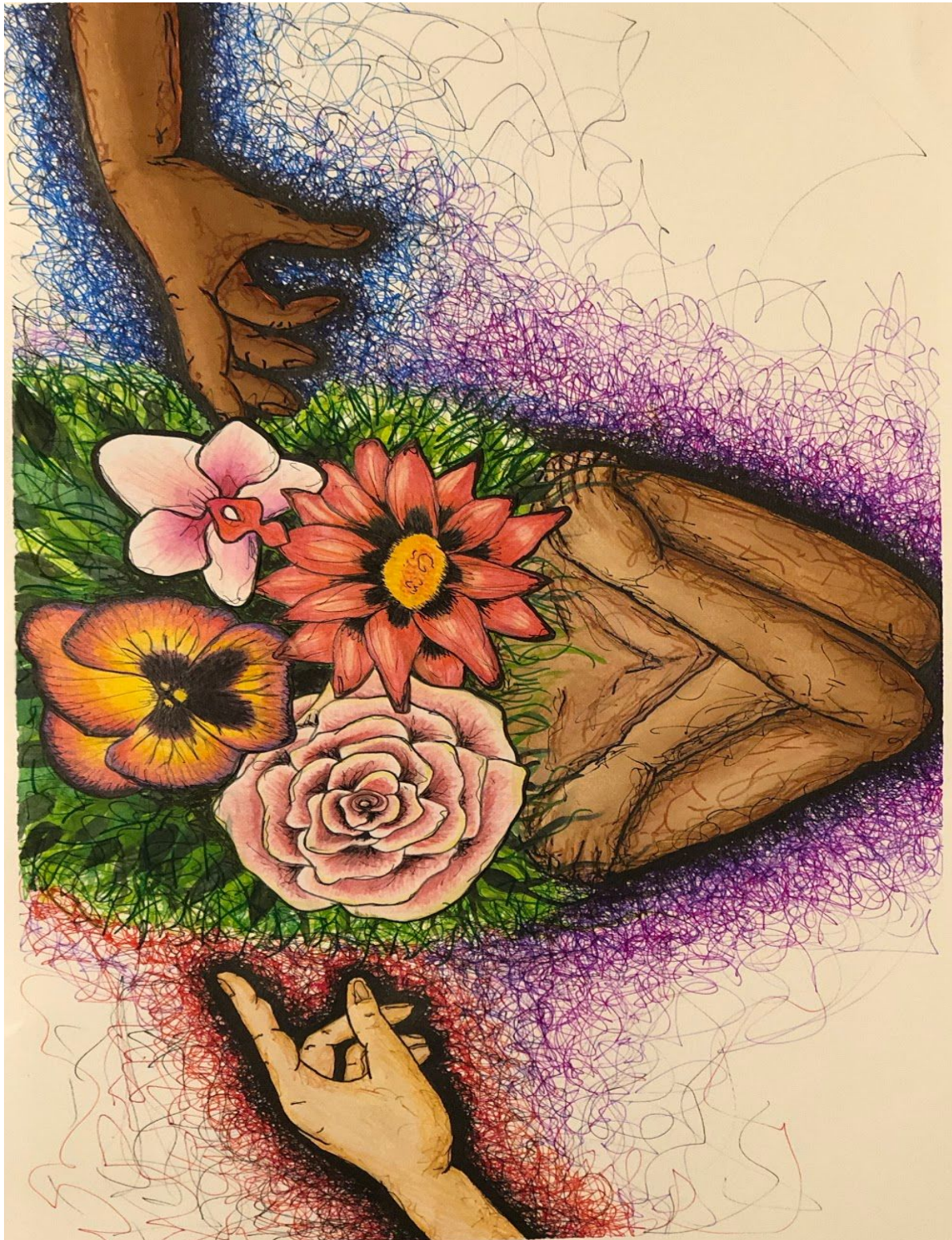
En este momento yo soy Latina  
                   y soy conectivo con mi gente

I am Latina and I am present

-Amanda Bravo  
 February 28th, 2018



Appendix M - Drawn reflection



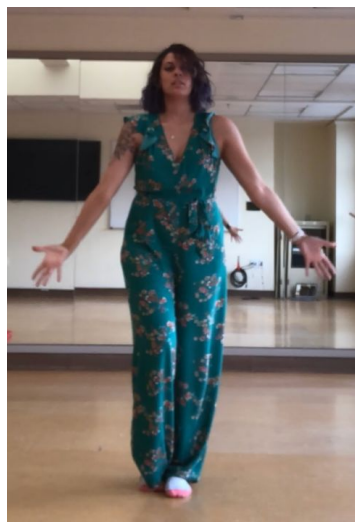


## Appendix N - Movement reflection



When beginning the movement response, I noticed that I was using only near reach with tension in the shoulders and a head tail connection that was concave at the nape of the neck. It was bound and held and although I moved around the space, there was barely any movement within my own body aside from the steps I took around the room. I noticed that I was feeling held and guarded – similar to the group the day of the workshop. I remembered the *mujeristas* stating that they wanted to open up and share, but that it was difficult to do so without being guarded. I used that memory to influence moments where I pushed my shoulders down in attempt to be more open. At first it was forced and temporary, letting down my guard, but after some time I began exploring mid reach in the horizontal planes.

These movements felt less in my control and more of a pull to each side. In the moment I did not have a reason for it, but it just felt right. Upon witnessing the recording, I realized it was a direct response to the groups expressed dismay of having to be “one or the other,” “Too Latina or not Latina enough,” the dichotomies. I felt myself moving in an indirect and quick way to each side in far reach in a way that was not in my control. Just as the movements began to feel too dizzying, I recentered myself and connected once again with my breath. I resumed my crossed arms posture for a quick moment, then began exploring my center in the vertical range. I based my next few movements on the type of explorations I witnessed in the group. Some explored their sense of self in relation to the stories others were telling, some based it on their own experiences, and others were not sure where to start. I put some of the movements I had seen during this portion of the workshop on my body and moved through them to gain an embodied sense of what they were experiencing.



Finally, I found myself swinging left and right once again, except this time instead of being dizzying and out of my control, they were more quick, but intentional, and free, but in my control. I was still exploring the dichotomies of myself, but rather than feeling like I had to be on the right or left, I let myself visit each side in my own time and eventually found a way to be open and in both sides all at once. I felt hyper aware of all of my fundamental connections and how I could use them for movement when I felt ready, but felt content in the posture I was in. My alignment was straight, but comfortable. My arms extended to mid reach, ready to come in for protection if needed, yet able to extend to far reach for further exploration if wanted. One foot was grounded while the other was slightly bent and ready for movement when needed, but I was comfortable where I was in space. The amalgam was fused and in that moment I felt a true sense of authenticity.

## Appendix O - Chica Project write up

## ***Express Yourself Community Workshop***

*On February 18th, Amanda Bravo, a former Empowerment Institute Fellow, led an Expressive Arts workshop at Lawrence High School for our community program. We asked one of our participants, Nathalie Diaz Troncoso, to provide us with a recap of the day:*

"For the main activity, we were asked to write. After sharing what we had written I noticed the common thread: we all felt that we needed to be one thing and not the other. We couldn't bring ourselves to accept that we could be both or even more. We were then asked to create a drawing that reflected the written piece. There was a lot of freedom that went along with it because it could've been something abstract, or something literal. As we shared these images, I felt that it was truly the part that had made an impact. Some of us took the risk to be vulnerable and share our stories with everyone, which showed me how universal the stories are.

So, I would like to thank the mentors for being there to support us and Amanda for giving us the amazing opportunity to express ourselves in an effective and new way!"

*Nathalie Diaz Troncoso*

*Junior at Boston Latin Academy*

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